

# Ashford's Town Centre Strategy Overview & Scrutiny Committee 22 January 2019





1. Deliver real, qualitative change at pace – don't wait for the 'perfect' masterplan
2. Celebrate and consolidate our 'old town', and excite people in the contrasting character of the emerging new Ashford alongside it
3. Recognise the key Council role of 'curating' our town centre – 101+ small initiatives will add up to help drive change and build confidence
4. Be brave and determined to be different – be afraid of being the same!
5. Recognise that, first and foremost, people want quality experiences

6. Work hard to understand what different generations and different groups of people want – e.g. millennials; grey pounders; young families
7. Temporary, ‘meanwhile uses’ and activity in public spaces are key points on the roadmap to more permanent solutions
8. Capture the imagination of the ‘5%’ of creative innovators in the population and use and grow local talent
9. We can achieve more by working with partners and critical friends to harness their skills and capacity
10. First impressions matter – get the welcome to our town centre right



**Identity  
Experience  
Appearance  
Accessibility**

The Fields of Battle exhibition attracted the busiest day recorded in four years with 18,022 visitors on 23rd June, with a 15% year-on-year increase in footfall across the month





loveashford 

LOVEASHFORD PRESENTS  
**SPLASHES OF SUMMER**  
JULY - AUGUST 2018

COMING SOON  
TO ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE

 **FREE**  
TOWN CENTRE  
EVENTS



67%

### SPLASHES OF SUMMER

67% of event visitors heard about an event through the colourful splashes around the town centre.

50%

### DRIVING FOOTFALL

50% of those that attended a Splashes of Summer event came into town specifically for the event and 67% of those visitors went on to visit businesses in the town.

87 / 100

### QUALITY EVENTS

When asked what they would rate the quality of the events they attended out of 100, visitors gave the events an average rating of 87.

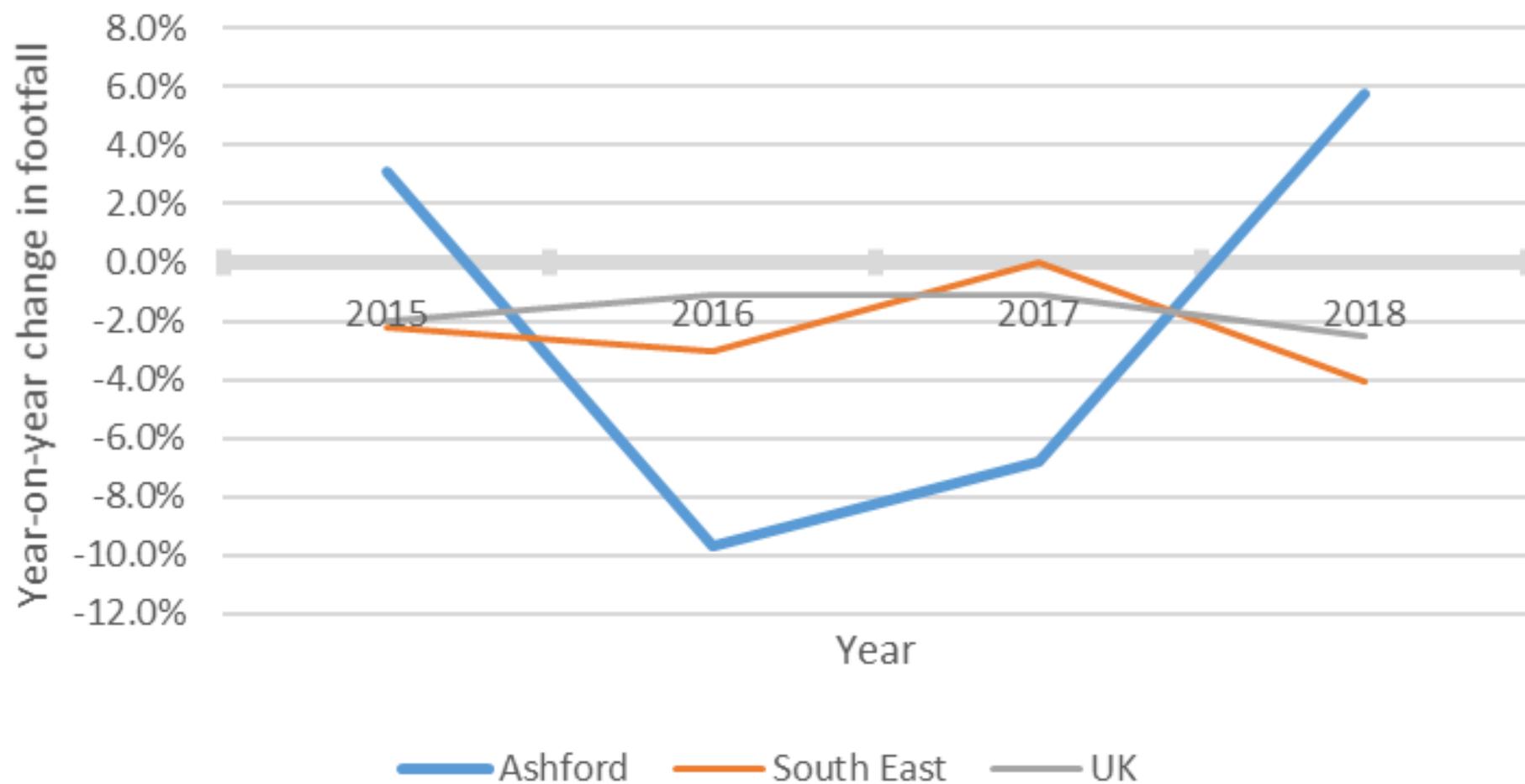
- 4575 overall app downloads
- 12,583 overall on the trail with app users
- Estimated 17,000 attended the trail (app and non app users)
- TIC had its busiest day ever
- Across the 3 months there was a 15% increase in Town Centre Footfall



# Bucking National Trends

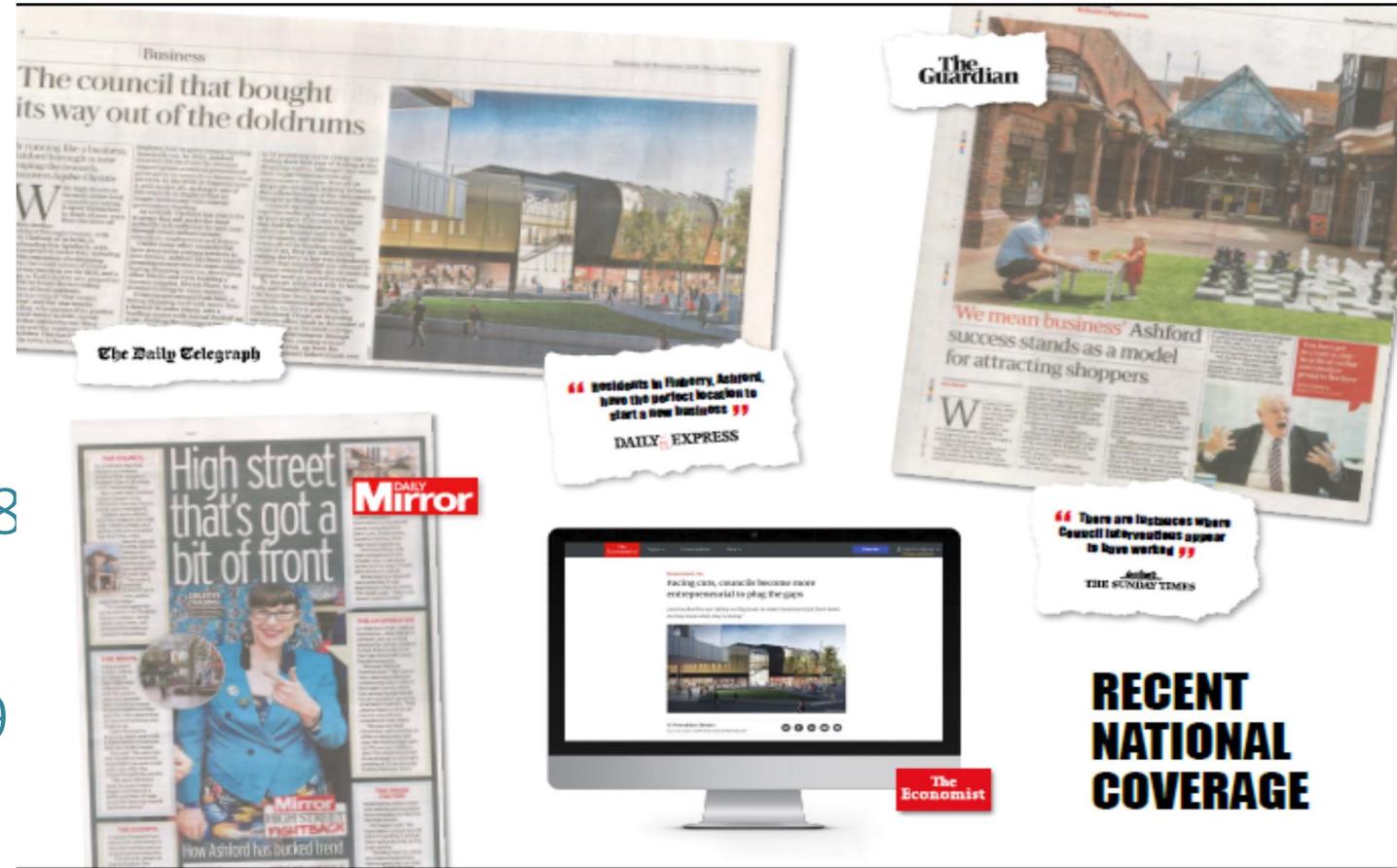
- Footfall for 2018 year to date up 5.8% on the previous year
- December 2018 footfall up 27% compared to December 2017
- Impressive festive footfall figures show 80,500 visitors the week before Christmas
- Footfall up an impressive 52% Christmas week
- 2018 trend shows vacancy rate reducing as national benchmark sees increase
- County Square's annual footfall figures show a 3.1% increase compared to 2017
- Almost 6.2 million people visited the shopping centre last year
- Made in Ashford in Park Mall trading figures for 2018 up 30% on December 2017
- The independent retailers' 2018 trading figures up 17% on 2017 figures

## Year-on-Year change in Annual Footfall



# National Coverage

- Guardian - July 2018
- Sunday Times – July 2018
- Daily Mail – July 2018
- Daily Telegraph – November 2018
- Daily Mirror – January 2019
- ITN evening news – January 2019



# Feedback from Town Centre Consultation

- July – October 2018
- Raised awareness of what's happening and planned for the town centre
- Questionnaire
- Online discussion
- Face-to-face
- Stakeholder conference
- Over a 1000 comments

# How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?

- Bring in something unique
- Be different from other Kent Towns
- A variety of entertainment and culture to be enjoyed by all/  
support for new cultural facilities and events
- Involve everyone
- More independents
- Better promotion

# How do we create a thriving, fun place to go out in the daytime and at night?

- Need a variety of entertainment / improve cultural offer
- Increase the number of events going on especially in the evening
- Remove barriers to having fun – create a safer environment

# How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible for all

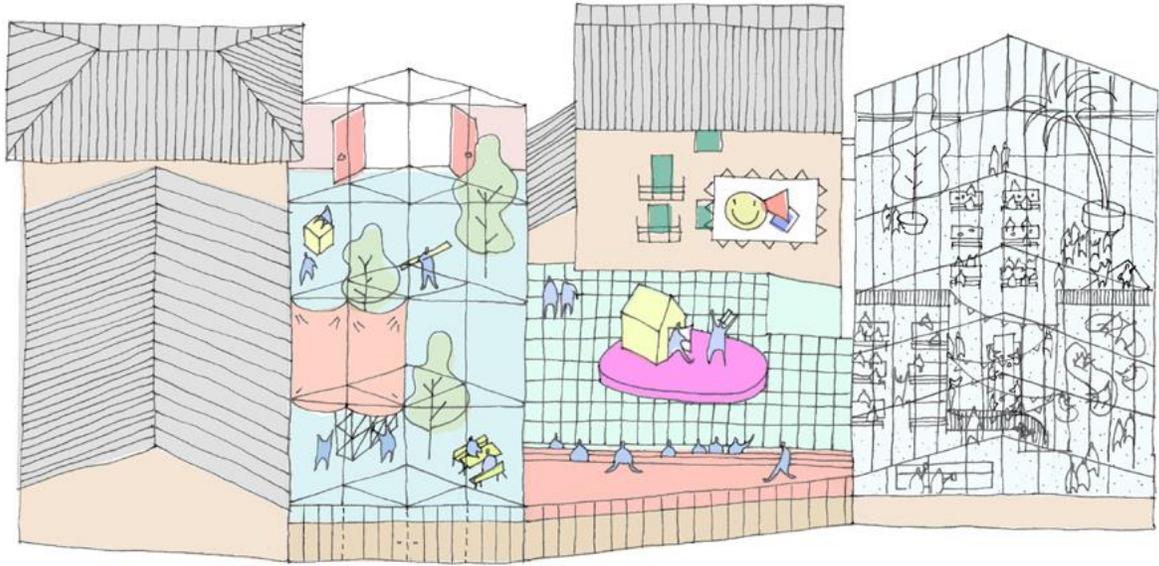
- Accessibility a barrier – it needs improvement
- Free/cheaper parking
- Improvement to public transport
- Make town more pedestrian friendly
- Better navigation, make sure signage is clear

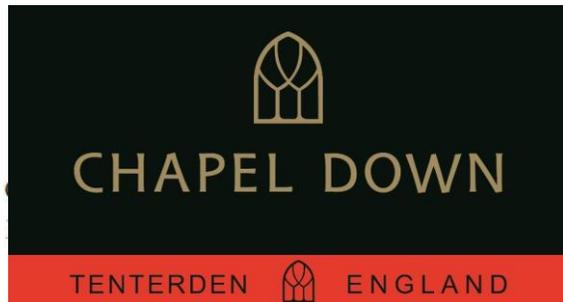
# How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

- The council has the right idea – support for Snowdogs and Coachworks
- Promote community – create opportunities to meet socialise with others
- Celebrate heritage as a market and railway town
- Keep the town centre clean and smarten up buildings
- Put the needs of locals first and visitors will come
- Be green

# National Policy

- £900m for business rate relief
- Planning reform – supporting the High Street and the delivery of new homes
- Expert Panel on High Streets
- High Street Task Force
  - Single voice for town centres, access to data, networking and sharing best practice
- High Street Fund - £675m
  - “renew and reshape town centres and High Streets in a way that improves experiences, drives growth and ensure future sustainability.”
  - Must demonstrate significant challenges











New Lane



Vicarage Field Residential Quarter

# Town Centre Framework – A Strategy to 2030

## Overall Vision

“Ashford Town Centre is a welcoming place with clear identity and a civic heartbeat where people meet, relax and have fun. “

## **Objective 1 - Ashford Town Centre is an attractive and safe place to live and visit where people feel welcome and have a sense of community and belonging.**

- Tackle ‘unloved’ parts of town
- Delivery of a mix of homes within the town centre to support the growth of the town and various sites
- Deliver the Community Safety Partnership rolling action plan
- Improve Town Centre lighting
- Enable more community led activities and events
- Improve shop frontages
- Redevelopment of Park Mall

## **Objective 2 - Ashford Town Centre offers unique and fun experiences for everyone to enjoy in the daytime, evening and at night.**

- Explore Mecca/Vicarage Lane site to create new community /cultural space within the town centre
- Develop a diverse and coordinated programme of Town Centre events to appeal to existing and new users making best use of the assets in the town
- Deliver Coachworks
- Encourage more family activities and entertainment in the Town Centre
- Support development of occupiers, meanwhile uses and marketing for both Park Mall and Elwick Place
- Continue to support and attract independent traders

## **Objective 3 - Ashford has a thriving town centre that is accessible, easy to navigate and well managed.**

- Explore the feasibility of delivery a new Multi Storey Car Park in Station Road
- Plan and deliver an attractive route from the station and International quarter to the High Street through a series of great spaces
- Promote and expand the Community Toilet scheme
- Relocate the One You Shop to include new changing places accessible toilet
- Review existing partnership arrangements for the Town Centre
- Work with partners to ensure adequate public transport provision in the day time and at night

# Resourcing town centre regeneration

- Town Centre Board recommends £130k added to draft base budget for 2019/20 (matched for next 10 years by £70k per annum from Designer Outlet s106) – total £200k recurrent funding.
- Benefits of NNDR pool membership targeted to town centre enhancements – existing pot of c£600k with up to £300k likely to be added
- Various s106 funding pots – some for specific spend (e.g. on open spaces), some discretionary (c £100k)
- Additional funding from s106 likely to come on stream (e.g. £150k from the scheme next to John Lewis)

# Next Steps

- Project ideas worked up by thematic groups
- Town Centre Framework/ Action Plan being drafted
- Report to March Cabinet
- Delivery